

Original Article

Employee Engagement in SMEs with Special Reference to Ballari

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Manuscript ID:

JRD -2026-180203

ISSN: 2230-9578

Volume 18

Issue 2

Pp. 11-20

February - 2026

Submitted: 15 Jan. 2026

Revised: 25 Jan. 2026

Accepted: 10 Feb. 2026

Published: 28 Feb. 2026

Abstract

The role of employee engagement is a major contributor to the overall productivity, retention, and performance of the organization. This is even more significant in the context of Small and Medium Enterprises (SMEs) as the human resources is the most critical for the organization to sustain its competitiveness. This study is aimed at analyzing employee engagement in SMEs with a focus on Ballari, a fast-growing industrial district of the state of Karnataka with major industries being steel, textiles, mining and engineering. The primary focus of the study is to investigate the main drivers of engagement, evaluate the existing engagement practices, and assess the gaps that SMEs face in employing and retaining the employee dedication and involvement. A descriptive research design was selected, and primary data was collected from the selected SMEs on both the employees and management levels using structured questionnaires and interviews. The research showed that as employees in Ballari SMEs had only a moderate level of engagement, the most issues were on the lack of the communication practices, the lack of training, and the lack of recognition. Additional research showed that a major influence on the level of engagement was from the more supportive the leadership, the better the working environment, and the more opportunities there were for career planning and development. The Ballari SMEs also faces the issues of a lack of broad and detailed formal HR policies, very limited HR budget, and very high employee turnover. The research suggests that the engagement has to be strengthened with the more strategic use of HR aimed tools, and also suggests specific actions on the development of the organizational culture initiatives, employee motivation, and employee life quality.

Keywords: Employee Engagement, SMEs, Organizational Performance, Workforce, Motivation, HR Practices, Industrial Sector

Introduction

Today, businesses realize that the success of their organizations more than ever before depends on employee engagement. This term became popularized after Kahn (1990) introduced engagement as the psychological presence and total absorption of employees into their work roles. Researchers have linked the various facets of engagement, such as improved job performance and organization commitment, and greater employee well-being. Engaged employees are more productive, turnover less, and have a better customer focus (Harter, Schmidt, and Hayes, 2002). These results are especially important for Small and Medium Enterprises (SMEs) since their human resources are one of the most important sources of competitive advantage. In developing countries such as India, SMEs have become integral to the growth of the economy. In rural and urban areas, the Ministry of MSME states that SMEs are major contributors to the economy and job creation. Within the state of Karnataka, the district of Ballari is known for its diversified industrial base, particularly in steel, mining, textiles, and engineering. As stated by Dhar (2019), SMEs in the semi-urban industrial clusters rely significantly on the retention and motivation of skilled labor, making sustainable employee engagement strategies critical.



Quick Response Code:



Website:

<https://jrdrvb.org/>

DOI:

[10.5281/zenodo.18918785](https://doi.org/10.5281/zenodo.18918785)



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How to cite this article:

Patil, S. M. (2026). Employee Engagement in SMEs with Special Reference to Ballari. *Journal of Research & Development*, 18(2), 11–20. <https://doi.org/10.5281/zenodo.18918785>

As a result, employee engagement in Ballari's SMEs is not solely an HR obligation, but also a critical factor for operational continuity and sustained growth. To gain a better understanding of the Ballari SMEs workforce profile, a demographic survey. Respondent data are summarized in Table 1.

Table 1: Demographic Profile of Respondents

Category	Percentage (%)
Male	60%
Female	40%
Age 18–25	25%
Age 26–35	50%
Age 36–45	25%

As indicated in Table 1, a majority of the respondents are in the age range 26-35 showing that SMEs in Ballari have a relatively younger workforce. SMEs in Ballari are characterized by a relatively younger workforce, a demographic trend that is consistent with the findings of Schaufeli and Bakker (2004) who state that younger employees, if well engaged, are likely to exert more energy and be more committed to the firm due to their aspirations to grow in their careers. The understanding of the demographic structure plays a significant role in explaining the engagement drivers for SMEs in the region.

Engaged employees show positive behavioral outcomes and emotional benefits (Saks, 2006), where positive feelings will overlap with behavioral expectations. The factors that drive employee engagement, be it employee driven, organizational, or job related, will positively correlate with the employees behaviors and emotions. As engagement is not a one-dimensional concept, organizations with more complex operational processes such as SMEs, need to understand the concept on a multidisciplinary level to retain desirable engagement and productivity levels. Figure 1 showcases the engagement factors on a magnitude that employees perceive them to be important individually such as leadership, recognition, work environment, and training.

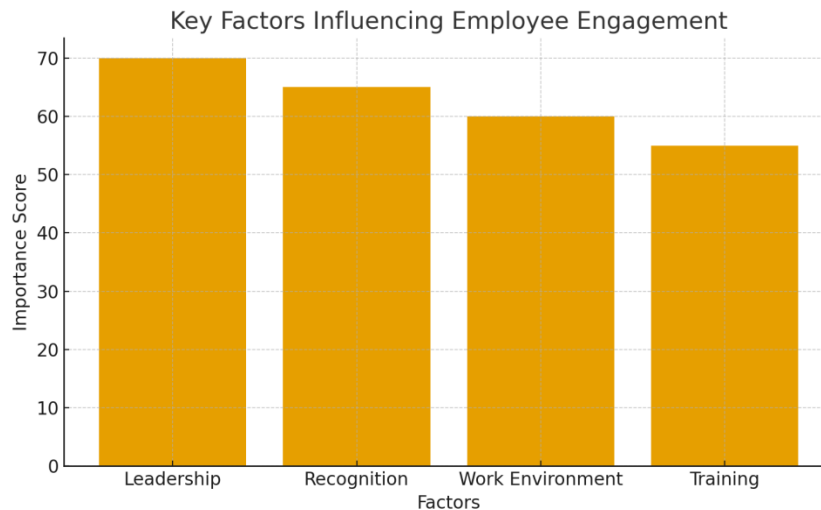


Figure 1: Key Factors Influencing Employee Engagement

(The bar chart illustrating importance scores for leadership, recognition, work environment, and training appears above.)

Yukl (2013) aligns with this. He articulated that because of supportive leadership behavior, employees will trust the leadership and feel that they belong. In SMEs, where the management hierarchy is more flat and the employee-to-manager ratio is such that employees can frequently interact, the leadership component will yield higher levels of engagement outcomes.

Emotional engagement also depends on trust, which can be nurtured by improving communication. Men (2014) argued that open communication creates trust and emotionally attaches the employee to the organization. SMEs, especially in smaller urban regions such as Ballari, suffer from open communication due to their informal management communication. Rana, Ardichvili and Tkachenko (2014) would support this by stating that for any communication to be engaging, the communication has to reduce uncertainty.

The practices of reward and recognition enhance engagement even further. As noted Armstrong(2010}, motivators of employees include positive motivation, reward, recognition, and career advancement. Due to the financial constraints that SMEs experience, the importance of non-monetary recognition is profound. The impact of recognition illustrated in

Figure 1, is consistent with Brun and Dugas (2008) who have emphasized recognition as a significant determinant of intrinsic motivation.

Though the company's setting and culture do matter, just the same, out of the three, it appears that the workplace environment takes precedence most. According to Maslach, Schaufeli and Leiter (2001), "...engagement is the positive antithesis of burnout"; accordingly, supportive settings diminish stress and bolster employee stamina. Position of Ballari SMEs, particularly mining and manufacturing, is that they encounter demanding occupational tasks; thus, it is of utmost importance that they adapt to the formation of conducive occupational settings. Aligning with this, Luthans and Youssef (2007) state that having positive psychological assets such as hope, resilience and optimism influence the degree to which employees are engaged.

Another factor that is important to consider is training and development. Enhanced training translates to improved attainment of employee skills, which, as Noe (2010) posits, provokes the employees' confidence and commitment to pursue the goals of the organization. The relative importance of training to employee engagement, albeit considerably lower, is significant, as is shown in Figure 1. In Ballari, however, SMEs are more prone to under investing in training, hence, employee training and development engagement are more likely to be compromised. This is the reality that this training is at the lower end of the scale.

Perceptions of fairness are also strongly connected to levels of employee engagement. According to Greenberg (1990), the influence of organizational justice (whether concerning the distribution of resources, decisions, or treatment) on commitment and satisfaction is profound and unarguable. Though in SMEs the organizations have relatively flat hierarchies and the interactions are direct, hence the disparities more significantly influence employees' attitudes.

Analyzing employee engagement in the context of Ballari's advancing industry is timely and appropriate. Ballari's employee demographics include a young, dynamic, and varied workforce which, combined with a growing number of industries, increases the need for SMEs to implement engagement approaches that will enhance productivity and retention of trained employees. Understanding the balance between the demographic information of employees (Table 1) and the drivers of engagement (Figure 1) establishes a clear baseline for workforce behavior analytics in Ballari.

The goals of this research study are to determine the level of employee engagement among SMEs in Ballari, the factors that drive that engagement, the barriers to employee engagement, and how those engagement barriers can be addressed. The study analyzes employee engagement from the bottom up (i.e. employees' perceptions) and from the top down (i.e. organizational processes and systems) to determine the extent to which SMEs can enhance their human capital and overall performance against their competitors in the region.

Literature Review

Conceptual Foundations of Employee Engagement

Kahn (1990) defined employee engagement as the 'harnessing of organization members' selves' to their work role, of which there are three areas of engagement: work-role related physical, cognitive, and emotional. Kahn's engagement conceptualization formed the basis of much research in the area of employee engagement and identified employee engagement as a psychological state where the employee expresses their full self in the performance of their work role. The definition of employee engagement was expanded further by Schaufeli and Bakker (2004) to include 'positive and fulfilling psychological state' of the employee that is characterized by vigor, dedication and absorption. The researchers also suggested the 'Job Demands –Resources' (JD-R) Model to explain how resources provided in the job (e.g. Autonomy, Feedback, and supervisor support) can lead to higher employee engagement.

Drivers and Determinants of Employee Engagement

The employee engagement initiatives should include consideration of job and organizational variables, since both play a role in employee engagement (Saks, 2006). These organizational variables include perceived support from the organization and fairness and equity in processes (i.e. procedural justice).

The work of Harter, Schmidt, and Hayes (2002) surveyed a large number of studies and concluded that there is a strong correlation between organizational performance and employee engagement, as indicated by higher profits, productivity (less absenteeism), and employee retention. Additional factors associated with the performance of the organization include job clarity and recognition, as well as opportunities for development and advancement of the employees.

Recognition and reward systems, together with the specification of expected performance, are the triad on which employee engagement rests (Armstrong, 2010). Even recognition that comes with no financial value, such as praise, autonomy, and inclusion in decision-making, has a considerable impact on engagement.

Recognition of efforts and achievements positively impacts intrinsic motivation and engagement (Brun & Dugas, 2008). Meaningful recognition of efforts enhances employees' pride and commitment, as this recognition has a considerable impact on the efforts and achievements employees put into their work.

Engagement in SMEs

Wong and Wong (2007) state that SMEs frequently unsettle their engagement strategies because of their absence and that of their employees' HR system frameworks. SMEs' informal leadership approaches complemented by informal or inexistent training budgets, they argue, lead to employees perceiving low organizational support.

Dhar (2019) argued that motivation together with employees' skill levels in emerging economies heavily depend on SMEs, hence the importance of engagement to sustain productivity and retention. Inconsistent engagement practices in SMEs are often a result of informal HR processes.

Psychological and Workplace Factors

Engagement, an outcome of a healthy work environment characterized by manageable workloads and social support is a reaction to burnout (Maslach, Schaufeli & Leiter, 2001). In a context where employees are fairly treated and supported socially, employees' energy and commitment are sustained endorsed.

Engagement is influenced by psychological capital (hope, resilience, optimism, self-efficacy). It was argued that psychological positive resources allow employees to cope with challenges and stay motivated.

Communication, Leadership & Organizational Support

Men (2014) pointed that the engagement is fostered by trust, which is facilitated by transparent, empathetic and consistent communication from leadership. Her focus is on showing how effective internal communication eliminates ambiguity and increases morale, resulting in greater emotional engagement of employees.

Research Methodology

1. Research Design

- With a focus on the small and medium enterprises located in Ballari, this investigation utilized a descriptive and cross-sectional design to analyze the state of employee engagement.
- Designed to gather information in the span of a two-month field study.

2. Study Area (Specific to Ballari)

Data collected from major SME clusters in Ballari district:

- **KSSIDC Industrial Estate (Kolagal Road)** – engineering & fabrication SMEs
- **Toranagallu Industrial Zone** – steel rolling and JSW ancillary units
- **DMM Textile Belt (Daroji–Munirabad)** – garment and power-loom SMEs
- **Cowl Bazaar & Halageri** – granite cutting, welding and small workshops

3. Research Participants

- Immediately engaged in, or have held in the recent past, a position in the small and medium enterprises that are manufacturing, service-oriented, textile, fabrication, or engineering.
- Participants held one of the following job designations: supervisor, line manager, helper, welder, tailor, operator, or fitter

4. Sample Size

Total respondents: 150

- **125 employees**
- **25 managers / supervisors / HR**

SMEs covered: 30 SMEs across Ballari clusters

- Toranagallu steel ancillary belt
- KSSIDC Industrial Estate (Kolagal Road)
- DMM textile/garment belt
- Cowl Bazaar–Halageri granite & fabrication cluster

5. Sampling Technique

- **Purposive sampling** to select accessible SMEs (20–150 workers).
- **Convenience sampling** for employees available during shift breaks.
- Inclusion criteria: **minimum 1-year work experience.**

6. Data Collection Methods

Primary Data

- Survey instruments employing a structured approach (n = 28; 5-item Likert scale).
- According to the management field, semi-structured interviews with 15 managers or HR management executives (n = 15).
- Field observations of the working environment, occupational safety, shift patterns, etc.

Secondary Data

- MSME Annual Report
- District Industrial Profile – Ballari (MSME-DI Bengaluru)
- Company HR documents and industry reports

- Research articles and government publications

7. Data Collection Timeline

- Total duration: 2 months
- Weeks 1–2: Permissions & SME identification
- Weeks 3–6: Survey administration & interviews
- Weeks 7–8: Data cleaning & analysis

8. Data Analysis Tools

- Percentage analysis
- Mean and standard deviation
- Cross-tabulation
- Graphs: bar charts, pie charts, tables
- Basic correlation between engagement factors and engagement levels

Results And Analysis

This chapter is focused on employee engagement, specifically on the Small and Medium Enterprises based in the Ballari district with the respondents coming from a pooled sample of 150 people, 125 employees and 25 managers, from 30 SMEs of the major industrial clusters in Ballari - Toranagallu steel ancillary units, textile SMEs of the DMM belt, fabrication and engineering units in KSSIDC Industrial Estate, and Halageri-Cowl Bazaar granite/welding.

The results depict the engagement, nature of the workplace, conditions and perceptions of employees and leaders, the sector and training received, were captured with a mix of graphics and text.

1. Employee Engagement Levels in Ballari SMEs

Employee Engagement Levels in SMEs (Ballari)

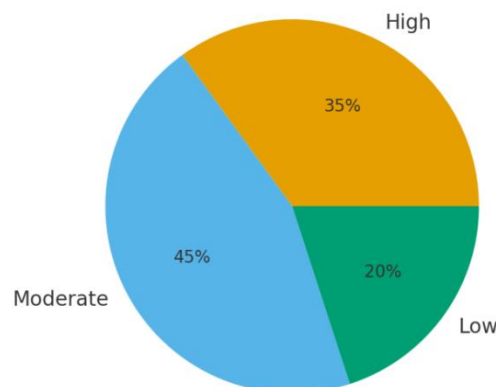


Figure 2: Employee Engagement Levels in SMEs (Ballari)

The first figure provides an overview of all of the respondents' employee engagement levels. The engagement levels per employee are as follows according to the pie chart. A proportion of employees, 35%, indicated that their engagement levels are high. In contrast, 45% have moderate engagement levels, while 20% of the employees have low engagement.

When converted into raw numbers:

- **High engagement:** 53 employees
- **Moderate engagement:** 68 employees
- **Low engagement:** 29 employees

The data shows that employees in SMEs in Ballari have a moderate level of engagement and from that, we can deduce that they are performing at a satisfactory level but are not going above and beyond in their effort. As is common in SMEs, the issues that could have this effect, particularly in the SMEs of Ballari, are the lack of advancement opportunities, monotonous work, or a lack of recognition.

Having 35% of employees reporting a high level of engagement speaks to the fact that a large number of employees are not just doing their work, but are actually caring and contributing to the organization. This is particularly true for those employees within the organized steel sector since they have better controlled HR policies and workplace safety.

The 20% of employees reporting low levels of engagement is primarily in the more physically demanding and less regulated workplaces like the granite cutting place, small fabrication workshops, and the textile production units. The overall lack of adequate ventilation and low safety measures can lead to a low satisfaction level of the work that is being done.

The overall engagement in the Ballari SMEs shows a fairly stable engagement level but there is a lot of room for growth, particularly in the disengaged sectors in Ballari that have poorly developed HR policies.

2. Analysis of Factors Influencing Engagement

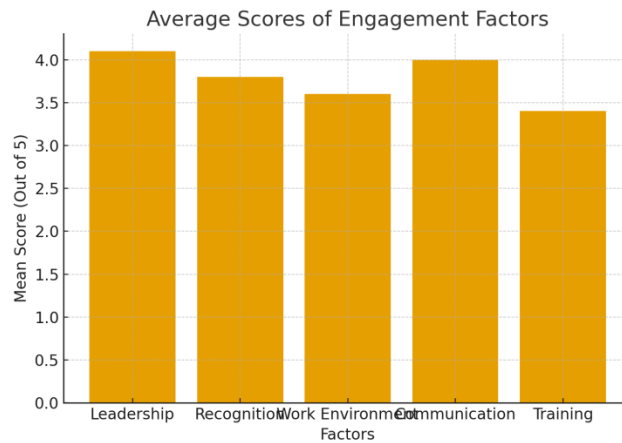


Figure 3: Average Scores of Engagement Factors

The second chart provides a comparative view of the five major factors influencing employee engagement, evaluated on a 5-point Likert scale.

Table 2: The mean Scores

Factor	Mean Score
Leadership	4.1
Communication	4.0
Recognition	3.8
Work Environment	3.6
Training	3.4

The results show that leadership (4.1) and communication (4.0) are the two strongest positives Ballari's SMEs have. This top score indicates the essential role of the daily communication that takes place between employees and their managers, particularly in the case of small and medium-sized enterprises where the managers are more hands-on than in larger organizations.

While recognition scored at 3.8 and is relatively high, it is still informal for most SMEs. Many employees reported appreciation as simple things like verbal thank-yous, festival bonus distributions, or shift flexibility. Not having any formal recognition programs limits formal long-term motivation.

A score of 3.6 shows how work environment conditions are mixed. Most large fabrication workshops and steel ancillary units have better work safety equipment and more sophisticated work routines. Meanwhile, textile and granite units have work exposure challenges, including heat, dust, noise, and poor workstation ergonomics.

The lowest scoring factor, training at 3.4, shows the biggest gap. Continuous skill debt programs are sporadic, minimal, or only cover the most elementary safety orientations. Continuous lack of training keeps employees from going further in their current positions, decreasing the lack of training having adverse consequences.

In summary, Ballari SMEs have strong leadership and communication, but with weaker training and work environment conditions, which suppress overall workforce motivation.

3. Sector-Wise Comparison of Engagement Scores

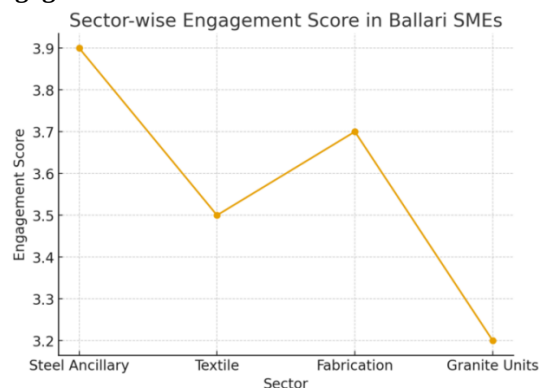


Figure 4: Sector-wise Engagement Score in Ballari SMEs

The third figure shows a comparison of average engagement scores across the four SME sectors studied.

Table 3: The Engagement Scores

Sector	Engagement Score
Steel Ancillary	3.9
Textile	3.5
Fabrication	3.7
Granite Units	3.2

The steel ancillary units of Toranagallu have the highest engagement as a score of 3.9, which is likely due to having large companies, for example, JSW Steel, who positively impact having safety norms in place and having more structured HR practices and communication systems. Employees in this region also reported better job security.

Small fabrication units in KSSIDC Industrial Estate and Ballari city report moderately positive engagement (3.7). Employees in these SMEs benefit from team work, active supervision, and possibilities of learning new skills such as machine operation or welding.

Textile SMEs in the DMM region is slightly lower than the fabrication units at 3.5. The lower engagement is attributed to work being monotonous, there being high production quotas, and the lack of various welfare facilities.

Granite cutting and welding units report even lower engagement at 3.2. These units tend to be small, informal, and highly labor intensive with little to no human resources. The lack of safety structures at work, exposure to dust, and highly irregular pay directly contribute to lack of engagement.

The variation across units in different sectors indicates that engagement levels are likely attributed to the level of infrastructure available, safety regulations, pay intervals, and overall managerial practices.

4. Leadership Satisfaction Among Employees

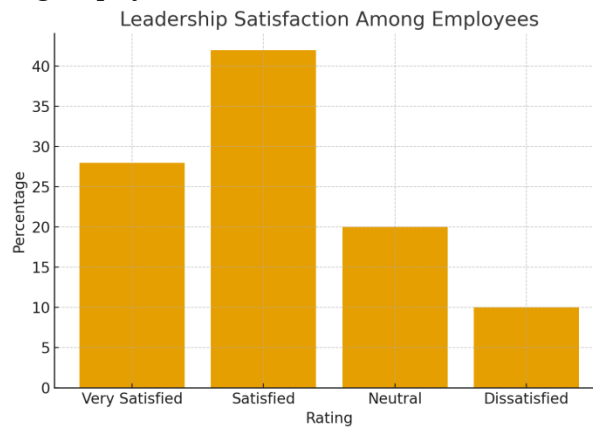


Figure 5: Leadership Satisfaction Among Employees

Leadership quality is a vital driver of engagement, especially in SMEs. The bar chart shows:

- **Very Satisfied:** 28%
- **Satisfied:** 42%
- **Neutral:** 20%
- **Dissatisfied:** 10%

The accumulated 70% satisfaction level indicates that Ballari SMEs supervisors and managers mainly enjoy and maintain good relationships with their subordinates. This correlates to the engagement factor scores where leadership ranked the top. However, the neutral 20% employee group indicates that the leadership style is comparatively better for some units than for others, that is, inconsistent. The 10% dissatisfied employees are largely from the granite and small fabrication units where there is informality of leadership and lack of proper professional HR management. This is an indication that the lack of leadership development training is the factor that if addressed, would improve the employee engagement levels.

5. Training Adequacy and Skill Development

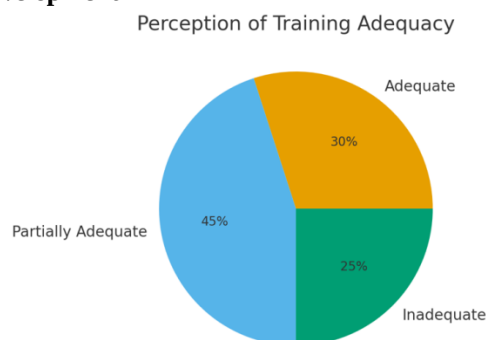


Figure 6: Perception of Training Adequacy

The last figure presents employee perceptions of training adequacy:

- **Adequate:** 30%
- **Partially Adequate:** 45%
- **Inadequate:** 25%

While an employee satisfaction level of 70% is significant, it is even more so when it is realized that the 70% is made up of employees who think that training being provided is either partially adequate or inadequate. It is also an adequate description of the restrictions that are present in Ballari SMEs. The major reporting they get is that of training pertaining to basic machine handling or seat belt safety training, not to long lasting skills development training.

In contrast to textiles and granite units, steel ancillary units provide a more substantial level of training because of the legal compliance regulations in place. In contrast, textiles and granite units provide little to no formal training, resulting in disengagement and dissatisfaction.

Given the significance of training on the retention and growth of employees, improvement of training opportunities is Necessary.

Findings from the Analysis

Insights from the employee engagement analysis at Ballari SMEs show that the majority of the employees, which is about 45% of them, show moderate engagement while 20% show low engagement. This indicates that the Ballari SMEs need to find a way to fix the challenges embedded in working conditions (high workloads, low pay, lack of recognition) in order to improve motivation. Concerning the employee's satisfaction, the leadership (4.1) and communication (4.0) scores, and supervisor's satisfaction (70%) indicates that the SMEs in Ballari have developed strong and positive leadership and communication skills reflecting healthy working relationships. On the other hand, training is the most weakly rated area and in need of improvement (30%), which indicates that many of the units lack the implementation of organized and systemized training of skill development and formal HR practices. Moreover, the working conditions of the granite and textile SMEs is poor and, running the high strains, high temperatures, and high dust and unsafe work conditions that the textile SMEs work in, reflect the moderate (3.6) scores. There is employee recognition (3.8) and motivation, but the motivation is inconsistent because it is largely informal recognition. There is analysis that indicates a clear variability by sector, in which the steel ancillary units have the highest engagement, and then the fabrication units, while the textile SMEs have moderate engagement and the granite units have low engagement.

These contrasts are connected with safety protocols, organizational frameworks, and employment wage consistency. Moreover, numerous small and medium enterprises, particularly smaller workshops, do not have SHRC policies and procedures, such as record-keeping, complaint procedures and mechanisms, and systematic employee orientation, which have a detrimental impact on employee engagement and employee dissatisfaction.

The evidence is unequivocal that Ballari SMEs have exemplary leadership and communication skills, but this is not paralleled by a positive impact on training and work environments, structural recognition, and other similar facets of positive recognition. The extent of employee engagement is moderately satisfactory; however, without the implementation of deliberate designed structural frameworks of HR, the goals of organizational productivity and retention will remain stagnant. Ballari certainly have the strength of good leadership practices.

Discussion

The study gives valuable evidence about the level of employee engagement in the SMEs in the Ballari district. This study shows that while the leadership and communication skills congruent with the strong will of the employees, the levels of engagement are moderate showing that the organization needs to adopt more systematic, and employee-focused HR Strategies, Since a moderate level of employee engagement means that employees are doing the minimum required for the job with no higher-level emotional engagement with the organization. This is a common engagement

pattern observed in the SMEs where there are no resources, informal organizational structures, and operational priorities are focused on other pressing issues to limit the application of engagement practices.

An inadequacy of training in many of the sectors is of great concern for the study. Without the ability to gain skills and training, employees become disengaged because they know they will be unable to advance in their careers. Their disengagement is a large concern. The studies show that within the buildings that make granite, textiles and small fabricated structures, the low levels of engagement and satisfaction. This shows the connection of the employees motivation(to be at work) with the physical working conditions they have to endure, This there working conditions that have Harsh, noise, dust, heat, repetitively low tasks that are rather poor, that working conditions, are severe. Their UN compliant poor working conditions are the cause for the low working morale and abseessive working productivity.

An analysis carried out in relation to retention and motivation also revealed the informal character of acknowledgment of employees and recognition of their contribution to the organization. Certainly, employees receive acknowledgment of their contributions to the organization during their performance, but the absence of mechanisms to provide formal recognition contributes to the lack of sustained engagement. This problem is particularly pronounced in the small- and medium-sized enterprises (SMEs) because of the owner-manager style of management where there is no systematically organized human resources (HR) management.

Further, sectoral diversification confirms the pattern of engagement with the degrees of organizational development, safety, and wages in the particular field. In the sector of Steel Ancillary, SMEs demonstrate a higher level of engagement with the employment of more organized mechanisms and better conditions of work, as opposed to the more unorganized sectors. By and large, the study demonstrates that the improvement of the engagement of employees in SMEs of Ballari, is better aimed by introduction of more organized mechanisms in SME management, such as, structured policies in human resources management, formal acknowledgment of employee contributions, improved safety, and higher level training.

Recommendations

- **Improving Training and Skill Development:** The SMEs should introduce continuous technical and safety training programs aimed at better performance of employees to enhance their competence, confidence, and engagement at work in the long term.
- **Improving the Workplace:** Better ventilation, lightening, safety equipment, and more ergonomic arrangements, particularly in units of granite and textile, will lessen the physical constrain and uplift motivation
- **More Formalized Recognition and Positive HR Practices:** More clear HR policies, systems of formal recognition, and systems of transparent and formal acknowledgment of employee contributions will enhance motivation, equity, and trust.
- **Strengthening the Supervisor Communication and the Involvement of the Employees:** Strengthening the involvement of the employees into the decision-making processes and frequent communication from the managers is proven to improve workplace satisfaction and employee engagement.

Conclusion

Research in the SMEs of Ballari has confirmed the role of these enterprises in the localized economies where they operate, but also the difficulties that remain in addressing the workforce motivation and commitment issues, the effect of these enterprises has on the local economies. This research has shown that most employees can be considered in the moderately engaged bracket. This means that their levels of involvement in their daily work is at an acceptable level, but not an optimal one. While leadership and communication have come out as the most impactful drivers of engagement, and also gained supportive supervised relationships, the overall potential for engagement is not being fully realized by the engagement drivers of training, recognition systems, and work environment. In sectors like granite cutting and textile production, the nature of work is also more physical, which will lead to lower engagement. However, in steel ancillary and organized fabrication units, the engagement levels are significantly higher and this can be attributed to the good safety standards, having a more structured operational system, and more robust HR practices.

Another aspect of the report examines extreme differences on a sectoral level which illustrates that in the case of some SMEs, particularly the smaller and more unstructured ones, a number of basic HR functions are completely absent including the implementing of organized HR functions pertaining to the onboarding of new staff, the establishment of grievance procedures, and the instituting of organized framework of employee training and development. The net effect of these factors tends to stifle the advancement of the employees and in the case of the enterprise, the performance and profit levels tend to remain at stagnated levels. The results are highly indicative that the improvement of the HR functions, enhancing the ambience of the workplace and modernization of the practices pertaining to Employee Engagement will result in a better level of retention of the staff, increased improvement in productivity and upliftment of the morale of the employees. Hence, while SMEs in Ballari display promising potential through strong leadership practices, there remains a substantial opportunity for improvement in creating more engaging, supportive, and growth-oriented workplaces.

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